

A Difficult Relationship

Intelligence Support for Richard M. Nixon (U)

John Helgerson

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During his eight years as Vice President in the 1950s, Richard Nixon had broad exposure to the activities of the civilian US Intelligence Community. He was aware that the CIA had briefed the presidential candidates in every election since 1952 and undoubtedly harbored mixed feelings about the way the process had worked in 1960. Nixon believed that his narrow defeat by John Kennedy had been caused, in part, by the actions and inactions of the intelligence agencies. This familiarity with the Intelligence Community's capabilities and practices made him willing, at the outset of his new campaign for the presidency in 1968, to accept briefings from CIA Director Richard Helms. It also led him to decline to receive routine briefings from lower-level officers, opening the way for Henry Kissinger, his National Security Adviser, to play a central and expanding role.

Nixon won the Republican Party nomination on 8 August 1968. Two days later the nominee and his running mate, Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland, flew to Texas to hear a "general review of the international situation" from outgoing President Lyndon Johnson and his key foreign policy advisers. In addition to the President, the group included Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Cyrus Vance (the number-two negotiator in the Vietnam peace talks in Paris),

and DCI Helms. The President welcomed the Republican candidates with a tour of his ranch in an open convertible, but, when the time came for the substantive briefing, he made only a few introductory remarks and then gave the floor to the CIA Director.

Helms's memorandum for the record indicates that he focused on the handful of international developments that were at a critical stage during the late summer of 1968, including the confrontation between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, events in the Middle East, and the military situation in Vietnam.¹ The Director also discussed Cuba, including Castro's support for revolutionary efforts in Latin America, and events in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Following Helms's briefing, Vance continued with a review of developments in the Paris peace negotiations that included details of the private talks under way between the United States and North Vietnam.

Helms recorded that Nixon and Agnew were interested, in particular, in the effects of the Soviet-Czechoslovak confrontation on Poland and Yugoslavia. He also noted that they were surprised to hear that the North Vietnamese were demanding that the Saigon government negotiate directly with the Communist shadow administration in South Vietnam, the National Liberation Front. During the course of the briefing, Nixon directed a number of policy questions to Rusk. The Republican candidate made clear he had no intention of saying or doing

John Helgerson is a former Deputy Director for Intelligence.

anything that would complicate the job of the United States negotiators in Paris.

Looking back on his first briefing of candidate Nixon 25 years after the fact, Helms recalled that, in his view, it was not a particularly well organized or useful session.² After his own 15-minute overview of key worldwide developments, he recalled, the politicians' instincts took over for the balance of the discussion in the sitting room at the LBJ ranch and during the one-hour lunch that followed. Johnson was on a liquid diet, recovering from a bout of diverticulitis, so he was free to do all the talking while the others enjoyed a meal of steak and corn on the cob. Helms recalled with some amusement that the President of five years and the candidate, with his eight years of vice-presidential experience, each wanted to demonstrate to the other his mastery of foreign affairs.

Nixon appears to have been pleased with the session; he later wrote positively in his memoirs about the "full-scale intelligence briefings ordered by Johnson for each of the nominees."³ The session concluded with the President's assurance to Nixon that he could call on Rusk or Helms for any additional information he might require.

As it happened, the discussion in Texas on 10 August was the only briefing Nixon was to receive in the pre-election period. That session had focused entirely on the facts of developments abroad and the status of negotiations in which the United States was involved. Unlike the situation that had developed in 1960, there was in the August briefing—and in the whole campaign in

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1968—no effort by anyone to make a political issue of the Intelligence Community's programs or analyses. A key factor that helped ensure that did not happen was Helms's strict constructionist view of the CIA Director's job. He was determined to stick to the facts and avoid involvement in policy discussions, unlike his predecessors Allen Dulles and John McCone.

Helms was aided in his determination to avoid any politicization of intelligence in 1968 by the fact that there were no presidential debates that year. Although there had been one debate during the primaries (between Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy), once the nominations were final Nixon concluded that he could avoid debating his opponent, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, just as Johnson had declined to debate Goldwater in 1964. Nixon's judgment was buttressed by the results of polls showing, as early as the first week in September, that he was leading Humphrey by a substantial margin, which he was able to retain throughout the campaign.

After a postelection vacation in Key Biscayne, Florida, President-elect Nixon and his wife returned to New York City on Monday, 11 November, stopping en route in Washington for lunch with the Presi-

dent and an impromptu afternoon of discussions with the President and his foreign affairs aides. In addition to the President, Rusk, and Helms, this time the group included Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Earl Wheeler, and National Security Adviser Walt Rostow.

Helms remembers that the afternoon meeting in the Cabinet room suffered from the short notice and complete lack of preparation. There was only a desultory exchange on substantive issues, inasmuch as "nobody knew what was wanted or expected."

Invigorated by his election and vacation, the President-elect was struck by the very different mood of the other participants as they concentrated on Vietnam.⁴ He recalled that those assembled seemed very nearly worn out from dealing with the prolonged crisis and "had no new approaches to recommend to me." Nixon said he saw the war etched on the faces around him and found them relieved to be able to turn the morass over to someone else. He recorded that they emphasized to him that the United States must see the war through to a successful conclusion and that a negotiated settlement that looked like a defeat would have a devastating impact on US allies and friends in Asia and around the world.

From Helms's point of view, the meeting on 11 November was significant for a reason unrelated to the discussion of Vietnam. Helms remembers that Johnson asked him to stay on for a private talk after the session adjourned. At that time, Johnson told Helms that Nixon had twice asked about him (Helms). Johnson said he told Nixon that he

"had no idea how Helms had voted, but that his was a merit appointment."

Johnson's kindness in recommending Helms to the Nixon administration may have resulted from a lingering embarrassment over the way he had treated Helms at an earlier point. In 1965, Johnson had passed over Helms to appoint VAdm. William Raborn, Jr., as DCI. At the time, Johnson informed Helms that, although he had heard good things about him, "you are not well enough known in this town," meaning Capitol Hill. But Johnson went on to tell Helms that he "should attend every meeting Raborn did."

The Director's only other meeting with Nixon during the transition period occurred later the same week when he was summoned to New York City on Friday, 15 November. Helms entered the Nixon suite on the 39th floor of the Pierre Hotel at 1:30 p.m. to find the President-elect conversing with adviser John Mitchell, who was to become Attorney General. With virtually no preliminaries, Nixon indicated that he would like Helms to stay on as DCI. The public announcement would come some time later.

Supporting Nixon's Team in New York City⁵

Discussions between Johnson and Helms resulted in a decision that CIA should make available to the President-elect in New York City the same daily intelligence information being provided to the outgoing President in Washington. Helms assigned the task of providing this assistance to R. J. Smith, the Agency's Deputy

Director for Intelligence. As a first step, he asked Smith to confer with Nixon's chief aide, former advertising executive Robert Haldeman.

Joined by Howard Osborn, CIA's Director of Security, and Richard Lehman, Deputy Chief of the Office of Current Intelligence, Smith went to New York on the morning of 12 November.⁶ Smith showed Haldeman a sample of the intelligence publications the Agency proposed to make available to Nixon—*The President's Daily Brief* (PDB), the *Central Intelligence Bulletin* (CIB), the daily *Situation in Vietnam*, the *Weekly Review*, and selected memorandums. In turn, Haldeman asked that the Agency initiate special intelligence security clearances for a number of staff members, including Richard Allen and Martin Anderson. They had been the President-elect's advisers on foreign affairs during the campaign and were to continue to advise him during the transition period.

It was agreed that CIA should establish in a secure area a reading room to which members of the Nixon staff could come for security indoctrination and to read classified documents. Space was not available in the Pierre, so it was decided to locate the Agency's outpost, dubbed "DDI-New York," in the basement of the Nixon Campaign Headquarters at 450 Park Avenue, six blocks from the office of the President-elect. This site, formerly the world headquarters of the North American Missionary Alliance and soon to be demolished, was chosen because it seemed unlikely to attract attention from the press and the public. Allen's office was also in the building.

Paul Corscadden, an 11-year veteran of the Agency's Office of Current Intelligence, was designated officer in charge. Kenneth Rosen, an intelligence officer who had served in the White House Situation Room under President Johnson and worked a year as a special assistant to McGeorge Bundy, was second in command. Corscadden and Rosen moved into the Statler-Hilton Hotel at 7th Avenue and 33rd Street for the duration of the transition period. Because of the expense of living in New York and the representational nature of the assignment, the Executive Director of CIA waived the standard per diem limitation and allowed each of them up to \$30 per day.

The area selected to house the Agency's facility required extensive renovation, which, magically, was accomplished by CIA's Office of Logistics in 72 hours, including one weekend. The construction activity did not go unnoticed by other occupants of the building. Reports soon circulated that the Secret Service, the FBI, or some other sensitive, top secret government agency had moved in and would, among other things, assume responsibility for the physical security of all the President-elect's staff offices and the protection of his family. The CIA Office of Security had decided not to identify the operation as Agency-sponsored but, rather, to allow anyone who learned of its existence to draw whatever conclusions they chose. This decision, reasonable on the face of things, led to unexpected consequences. Before long, Nixon staff secretaries were calling to ask that someone "behind the Black Door" investigate the disappearance of office supplies or solve the mystery of a purloined television set. On another occasion, the supervisor of

the staff mailroom demanded that one of the Agency communicators "taste" and immediately remove from the mailroom a crate of canned hams sent to the President-elect as a Christmas gift.

Those who were curious about what was housed behind that Black Door enjoyed the unwitting support of the municipal health authorities. Occupants of nearby buildings along Park Avenue had complained of an infestation of black rats that had established colonies in the ground around the brightly lighted Christmas trees festooning the avenue from 59th Street to Grand Central Station. Within hours, health inspectors poured through all the nearby buildings. A team came to the door of the Agency facility, demanding admission. They were turned away with the assurance that there were no rats inside.

Beginning on 19 November, intelligence publications were wired to New York on a daily basis. The *Situation in Vietnam* report arrived the evening of its publication in Washington; the PDB came soon after 5:00 a.m. each morning. Nixon staff members who had access to the intelligence publications came to the facility at their convenience. A reading table contained all of each day's publications, along with appropriate National Intelligence Estimates, special memorandums, intelligence handbooks, and various graphic aids. Of the key staffers, Allen and Anderson visited most often.

Corscadden and Rosen delivered each day a complete set of publications in a sealed envelope marked "Eyes Only—The President-elect" to Rose Mary Woods in Nixon's office. Woods had been granted the proper clearances, and the Agency had

installed a safe in her office for the secure storage of classified materials. Initially it was thought that she probably would return the publications after two or three days, during which time the President-elect would have had the opportunity to read at least a current issue of the PDB.

For the first 10 days of the operation, only intelligence analyses prepared for the outgoing administration were made available to the President-elect's staff. It soon became apparent, however, that the needs of the incoming administration did not coincide in every detail with those of the Johnson administration. To meet the emerging special needs of the new team, the Office of Current Intelligence on 29 November compiled the first "Nixon Special," an "Eyes Only" intelligence memorandum based upon sensitive intelligence information that the Agency knew would be of interest to Nixon. The Foreign Broadcast Information Service soon afterward provided an additional service by transmitting directly to New York from its field bureaus foreign press and radio articles pertaining to the incoming administration.

The Key Player: Henry Kissinger

The appointment of Harvard Professor Henry Kissinger as Assistant for National Security Affairs was announced by the President-elect at a news conference on 2 December. By prior arrangement with DDI Smith, who had telephoned him from Washington the morning of Nixon's announcement, Kissinger came to the Agency facility on Park Avenue for a briefing that same afternoon.⁷ He was shown current issues of all the intelligence publications

available in the facility and was told what had been delivered to the Pierre for the President-elect since the Agency support operation began. Kissinger was assured that the CIA was prepared to provide full support to him and the rest of the incoming administration.

During that first session, Kissinger expressed appreciation for the Agency's willingness to assist him and for the support it had so far provided the incoming administration. He promised to arrange his schedule to allow 15 minutes per day to read the intelligence publications. He also accepted a proposal that Corscadden and Rosen undertake during off-duty hours to advise him of any critical world developments requiring the attention of the President-elect. This precautionary arrangement had earlier been accepted by Allen and Anderson as well as Haldeman.

Kissinger asked for time to become familiar with Nixon's reading habits and daily routine before advising the Agency of any recommendations he might have for changes. He did say—in what foreshadowed Nixon's style and his own, in the White House—that it had been made clear to him that the President-elect had no intention of reading anything that had not first been perused and perhaps summarized by one of his senior staff. Kissinger said he did not know what had happened to issues of the PDB already entrusted to Rose Mary Woods but that, without his prior approval, future deliveries would not reach the President-elect. Two days later, Kissinger underscored that the Agency should not provide intelligence support to anyone at the Pierre other than the President-elect and himself; Mr. Haldeman and others from the campaign might have access

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to classified publications after they had arrived in Washington, but they would have no need for them before that time.

Kissinger reacted none too favorably to the first few issues of the PDB that he read. At one time, he expressed a preference for the CIB with its more complete text and greater detail. He complained that the prose in the PDB was too often elliptical and that the selection of topics was too random and lacked the continuity necessary for the uninitiated reader. Kissinger's points were well taken. The PDB was uniquely tailored to the needs of the outgoing administration—just as its predecessor had been shaped to the reading preferences of President Kennedy. Moreover, its authors could assume that President Johnson and his advisers were familiar with the background of the subjects covered each day. Nixon and Kissinger, however deep their background and however well read, lacked detailed familiarity with many of the ongoing, current issues addressed in the PDB.

This situation had been anticipated by the Agency, because it had come up in all prior transitions. The Office of Current Intelligence had already begun to devise a new version of the PDB for Nixon and his aides. Considerably expanded in length, the new brief had been circulated for comment to the DCI, DDI, and others of the Agency's principal officers. With their concurrence, it was decided to send the new PDB to New York. Kissinger approved its format and style at a meeting on the evening of 6 December. Thus, the Agency began to publish, in effect, two PDBs. The substance was the same, but the publication given to

Johnson was significantly more concise than that given Nixon.

To no one's surprise, it proved impossible to schedule briefings with Kissinger on a daily basis; he was seen frequently but unpredictably. His assistant, Lawrence Eagleburger of the Department of State, was seen every day and was notably more appreciative of the assistance he was provided.

On 9 December, Kissinger told Corscadden that he had been asked to brief the President-elect's "senior staff" and would need inputs for a 30-minute session on the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, the state of US-Chinese relations, the US-USSR strategic arms balance, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. He asked especially for "tidbits, local color ... things which will make these people think they're getting the inside story but which, if leaked, will not compromise or embarrass me or the President-elect or the United States Government." He promised to come to Park Avenue soon to review the drafts.

On the afternoon of 11 December, Kissinger paid his second visit to the basement suite on Park Avenue, arriving with Eagleburger. It was evident that the two had discussed the format Kissinger preferred even before he had seen the materials prepared

by the Agency. Eagleburger's assignment was to redraft CIA's contribution. After scanning the briefing book and posing one or two questions about de Gaulle's nuclear program, Kissinger asked for still more material on Berlin, the problem of Nigeria's breakaway state of Biafra, the strategic arms balance, NATO, the Russian intervention in Czechoslovakia, and the prospects for a meeting in Warsaw of Chinese and American representatives. Kissinger delegated to Eagleburger responsibility for preparing "drafts" for his consideration the next evening in Washington, when the President-elect proposed to unveil his Cabinet during a nationwide television broadcast from the Shoreham Hotel in Washington. Eagleburger worked in the basement at Park Avenue until 3:00 a.m., returned to the Pierre for a brief rest, and then assumed the job of redrafting and editing the briefing Kissinger was to give.

Eagleburger's task was complicated by the fact that, except for Woods, none of the Nixon clerical staff, including Kissinger's secretary, had yet been granted special intelligence security clearances. Corscadden arranged to have Eagleburger's preliminary text typed by the Agency secretary assigned to DDI-NY and to have it taken to the Pierre. Eagleburger was then driven to LaGuardia Airport for his flight to Washington. CIA officers met Eagleburger at National Airport and took him to an improvised two-room office at the Shoreham Hotel. They remained with Eagleburger for much of the night of 12 December, calling on the Agency's analytic resources to provide substantive backup through the Duty Officer in the Operations Center.⁸

During his late-evening television appearance, the President-elect disclosed that he and his Cabinet-to-be and top advisers would spend the following day, Friday, 13 December, in conference. One of the highlights of their all-day session would be an intelligence briefing by Kissinger. Agency officers received no direct feedback on the substantive discussions held on 13 December. They were interested that Kissinger, in their next meeting, directed that Attorney General—designate Mitchell receive the PDB and all other reports in which he expressed any interest. Before long, Mitchell was being briefed on a daily basis and proved to be "very helpful as a window into what Nixon wanted."⁹

In mid-December, Kissinger also directed that no National Intelligence Estimates were to go to the President-elect. Somewhat sharply, he explained that no one department or agency of the government would be permitted to present its views directly to Nixon to the disadvantage of any other. Corscadden pointed out that a National Intelligence Estimate was the product of the Intelligence Community as a whole, that it was issued in the name of the United States Intelligence Board, and could not be considered "parochial." This rejoinder had no appreciable effect.

Toward the end of December, Kissinger began to meet more regularly with Corscadden and Rosen. By then, Kissinger was able to read only the PDB with any regularity; DDI-NY was responsible for calling to his attention "critical items" in other publications. The balance of the 15-minute "daily" session was devoted to a capsule review of crucial international situations the new

administration was likely to face during its first few months in office—"stressing the significance, not the facts"—and to discussion of whatever papers Kissinger had requested of the Agency. He directed that memorandums prepared for Nixon should contain a "statement of the problem and an assessment of its significance," as well as a summary.

Kissinger's reading of an estimate on Soviet strategic attack forces led him to ask for an oral briefing on the US-Soviet strategic balance. After consulting with his military aide, Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, and with Eagleburger, Kissinger decided that the J-3 section of the Joint Chiefs should take the lead. CIA's Deputy Director for Science and Technology and Director of Strategic Research were also invited to participate in the briefing, which was held on Saturday, 21 December. In addition to Kissinger, Mitchell, Eagleburger, and Goodpaster were present.

This was the most formal briefing Kissinger received during the transition; unfortunately, it did not go well. The J-3 team that had traveled from Washington to conduct the briefing used only the "high side" numbers regarding Soviet capabilities in preparing their text and graphics. This prompted the CIA experts present to try to supplement the briefing and question some of its conclusions. In the discussion that followed, Kissinger, Goodpaster, and, finally, Mitchell asked ever-more probing questions, to the obvious chagrin of the briefers. Kissinger and Mitchell both made clear after the fact that they were not satisfied.

The issue of possible direct State Department involvement in the support process in New York arose as a

result of a PDB item on coup reports in a certain country. Kissinger asked about US contingency plans if a coup occurred. When the Agency officers replied that they were not normally privy to such contingency planning, Kissinger turned to Eagleburger and insisted that a representative of the Department of State attend the morning briefing sessions. Eagleburger discussed the idea with CIA, but nothing came of it. Years later, describing how the system worked, Eagleburger recalled that he "occasionally called on the State Department to send specific written materials—I was from State, after all—but the Agency team was all we needed right there."¹⁰

As Kissinger became more and more active toward the end of December, his probing questions and his insatiable demands for assessments of the significance of isolated developments—even those in the low order of probability—meant that far more speculative, estimative analysis was required. This led CIA to the strategy of having its substantive officers prepare detailed backup pieces to complement the topics covered each day in the PDB. These reports provided the generalists who briefed Kissinger with additional information with which to field his queries.

Mindful of Kissinger's repeated requests for "problem papers," special briefings on emergent crises likely to confront the new administration during its first months in office, and "must reading" before Inauguration Day, the Agency in late December began appending to the PDB a series of special papers focused on critical issues. For more than 18 months, the PDB, at President Johnson's request, had carried special annexes on Vietnam and on

North Vietnamese reflections on the US political scene. Kissinger decided that the annexes need not be sent to the President-elect and should not be published after Inauguration Day. The new "problem papers" were designed in part, therefore, to replace the Vietnam annexes in the New York edition of the PDB, which was by now being tailored for the incoming administration.

In the remaining days of the operation, Kissinger read the "problem papers" on such subjects as access to Berlin, the Communist troop buildup in South Vietnam, the military balance between the two Koreas, and the French economic situation. For each of these subjects, CIA analysts with the appropriate expertise traveled to New York to accompany the regular briefers. Especially in the cases of Vietnam and Korea, Kissinger had numerous questions. He wanted to know the Agency's past track record in estimates on the subject at hand and pressed the analysts for "your personal opinions."

On 6 January, Kissinger, who initially became Nixon's National Security Adviser, turned to the question of intelligence support on Inauguration Day and thereafter. By this time, Nixon had expressed his intention to hold regular staff meetings with his key advisers at 9:00 a.m. or 9:30 a.m. each morning. Kissinger surmised that he would brief the President for 30 minutes each morning, immediately following these staff conferences. He did not want to give Nixon anything he and his National Security Council staff had not had time to mull over and was anxious to "preview" intelligence reporting each evening, with an eye to meeting the Chief Executive early the next day.

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Kissinger proposed that the DCI change the publication time for the PDB from early morning to late afternoon, releasing the publication to him in the evening and to the President the following morning. This change, Kissinger admitted, would introduce a lag of 12 hours in the reporting time, but he was not disturbed that the PDB would be less current; he was more concerned that he have time to prepare his own comments on anything the President would see.

With Inauguration Day less than a week away, the Agency proposed to introduce to the President-elect and Kissinger an entirely new PDB—redesigned to meet Kissinger's specifications for a briefing paper tailored to Nixon's preferences. This new publication was to consist of three sections—Major Developments, Other Important Developments, and occasional annexes—all double-spaced and printed on legal-size paper bound at the top.

The first section, Major Developments, was to be subdivided into sections on Vietnam, the Middle East, Soviet Affairs, and Europe. This was not a static listing. As developments warranted, some areas could be dropped, others added. The second section, Other Important Developments, was intended to highlight problems which—though not

yet critical—could in time engage US policy interests. The annexes were to fulfill the same role as the "problem papers" that were appended to the PDB sent to New York during the early part of January. Kissinger approved the new format on 15 January.

Nixon Remains Aloof

The support operation mounted in New York constituted the most elaborate system yet designed to provide intelligence to a President-elect. Ironically, Nixon's aloof style resulted in a situation where the Agency had no direct contact with him. Until mid-December, for example, Agency officers were uncertain whether he had been reading the PDB or the other publications deposited each morning with his secretary. On 18 December, Eagleburger confided that Nixon had informed Kissinger that Woods had been "stockpiling" the unopened envelopes containing the PDB, CIB, and memorandums on Vietnam. Nixon had asked Kissinger to send someone upstairs to retrieve these envelopes so that Kissinger could review the collection and decide whether there was anything in it that the President-elect should read. The question had been answered: Mr. Nixon had read no Agency publications during the first month of the New York operation.

Eagleburger observes that Nixon's handling of the intelligence material was a result of his management style rather than any disinterest in foreign developments. In fact, he says, "Nixon was very interested—but it was just him and Henry. That's why you didn't brief him directly." Eagleburger did not see Nixon either—

briefings of the President-elect were the prerogative of Kissinger alone.

Other accounts, however, confirm more directly that Nixon's refusal to receive intelligence briefings personally stemmed from negative attitudes about the CIA that went well beyond an aloof and formal management style. Goodpaster, who worked with the transition staff to help organize the national security apparatus, remembers discussing with Nixon how the Eisenhower team had handled intelligence support. Goodpaster says Nixon "acknowledged the importance of intelligence, but also commented that when you needed it, it often wasn't there."¹¹

Discouraging as it was to CIA officers not to have personal contact with Nixon, a great deal of Agency material did reach the President-elect through Kissinger's daily briefings. According to Eagleburger, "Henry made heavy use of the CIA material. I remember especially Korea and other Asian issues. Henry would go in and go over the material with Nixon; documents would be left behind that Nixon would read." Rosen remembers how pleased the Agency team was when it would occasionally receive back from Kissinger copies of the PDB initiated by Nixon, confirming that at least some of the material was being read.¹²

Throughout the two months of the operation in New York, there was some uneasiness among Agency managers because Kissinger levied heavy demands for analytic work in the President's name, and Eagleburger levied similarly heavy demands in Kissinger's name. Without direct access to the principal consumer, it was always unclear how much of this material was really wanted or read by

Nixon himself. For the most part, however, it did not matter. CIA took pride in serving those who clearly would be the key foreign policy aides to the new president.

On one occasion the ambiguity about who was really speaking for whom was especially worrisome. A few days before the inauguration, Kissinger called Helms in Washington with a discouraging message. He said that the CIA Director, following the inauguration, should brief the National Security Council on intelligence matters at the opening of its meetings but should then leave the meetings before the policy discussions. This scenario was represented by Kissinger as Nixon's, but Helms knew it was a ridiculous idea. Long experience had shown him that policymakers, during the course of their deliberations, frequently needed to turn to the representative of the Intelligence Community for factual updates.

Two days following the inauguration, the first NSC meeting was held. At the outset, Nixon invited the attendees to stay for lunch following the meeting. With this encouragement, Helms stayed through the meeting and lunch. And with the precedent established, he simply stayed throughout all subsequent NSC meetings. The scenario earlier raised by Kissinger never surfaced again.

CIA's direct access to Nixon was limited to the briefings by the Agency's directors—Richard Helms, James Schlesinger, and, finally, William Colby—at meetings of the National Security Council. In an interview in 1982, Helms offered a graphic account of how difficult those meet-

ings could be, especially during the early period of the Nixon presidency:

From the very beginning of the Nixon administration, Nixon was criticizing Agency estimates, estimates done back when he was Vice President. What he knew about estimates in the intervening years I don't know. But he would constantly, in National Security Council meetings, pick on the Agency for not having properly judged what the Soviets were going to do with various kinds of weaponry. And obviously, he was being selective, but he would make remarks about this and say this obviously had to be sharpened up. The Agency had to understand it was to do a better job and so on. And I haven't the slightest doubt that Nixon's carping affected Kissinger, who after all was his national security adviser.

Despite this challenge to the estimates, the analysis and so forth of the Agency, the fundamental fact remains that if the things had not been read, if people were not paying attention to them there never would have been the challenge. So I don't think anybody needs to feel bad about a rocky period in the Agency's history. It was bound to be a rocky period with Richard Nixon as President, given the fact that he held the Agency responsible for his defeat in 1960. And he never forgot that, and he had a barb out for the Agency all the time because he really believed, and I think he believes to this day, that that "missile gap" question was

the responsibility of the Agency and that it did him in.¹³

When he was elected President in 1968, Nixon could hardly have imagined how the collection capabilities of the US Intelligence Community had improved since the end of his term as Vice President eight years before. At the time he had left that office, several years of U-2 flights had given the United States an invaluable look at the Soviet Union. But the flights had been intermittent and covered only a portion of Soviet territory. As a result, the United States in 1960 was still dealing in conjecture about possible deployed Soviet strategic systems, albeit informed conjecture. In 1968, it was dealing in facts. It was never clear that the cynical President appreciated what had changed.

As the years passed, the NSC forum was less and less fruitful. Colby remembers that "Nixon didn't operate well in meetings—he liked to make decisions on the basis of written material. When you did brief him on something, he looked like his mind was on other things—he may have been thinking about Watergate, I guess."¹⁴ Colby wrote in his memoirs that none of Nixon's three DCIs saw him outside formal or ceremonial meetings. "I remember only one private conversation with him; it occurred when he phoned to ask what was happening in China, and I provided a quick summary off the top of my head."¹⁵

Throughout the Nixon presidency, the PDB was delivered by courier to Kissinger's office. Kissinger each day delivered to the President a package of material that included the PDB along with material from the State

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Department, the White House Situation Room, the Joint Chiefs, and others. Nixon would keep the material on his desk, reading it at his convenience throughout the day. Feedback to the Agency typically was provided by Kissinger directly to the DCI.

A Closer Relationship With Ford¹⁶

In the late spring of 1974, when it was becoming apparent that Nixon would not survive the Watergate scandal, the DCI saw a responsibility and an opportunity.¹⁷ William Colby, who had been appointed Director in September 1973, decided that CIA should help the new Vice President, Gerald Ford, prepare for his likely elevation to the Presidency. Colby's initiative was to afford CIA unprecedented direct and daily access to the President when Ford moved into the Oval Office.

Colby modestly recounts that his decision to provide full intelligence support to Ford "had as much to do with good preparation in case something happened to the President—any president—as it did with Nixon's problems with Watergate." Colby remembers his belief at the time that "we should get the PDB to the Vice President so that he would know everything the President knew. We didn't want another situation like when Truman was unaware of the Manhattan Project."

Whatever his mix of motives, Colby invited the Vice President to visit CIA Headquarters. Ford came, on 12 June 1974, and was given wide-ranging briefings on intelligence operations and assessments. In response to Ford's request, Colby agreed to send him the PDB, in addition to the *National Intelligence Daily* he had been receiving. An Agency current intelligence specialist, David Peterson, was assigned to provide continuing intelligence support to the Vice President.

Ford accepted a suggestion that the PDB be brought to him directly, acknowledging that this would be the most secure way to receive the sensitive document. He specified that he would like to see it early each morning, preferably as his first appointment. Beginning 1 July, that became the regular routing, one that was altered only occasionally by such diversions as a Vice Presidential breakfast with the President or a speaking engagement out of town. On a few occasions, Ford was seen at his Alexandria home before he flew off to keep such an engagement. Always a gracious host, he brewed and served instant coffee.

Ford came to the vice-presidency an informed consumer of the products of the Intelligence Community. He notes that he "had become familiar with CIA first as a member of the Intelligence Subcommittee on Appropriations and later in other roles, including Minority Leader. I knew Colby from my days in Congress."¹⁸ This familiarity, particularly with Colby personally, was to provide the Agency at least a temporary buffer in some difficult times to come.

When Nixon resigned and Ford was sworn in as President on 9 August

1974, Agency officers were uncertain whether the briefings would continue. It seemed probable that Kissinger would intervene and terminate the sessions, substituting some other arrangement. (He was described later as "furious" when he learned of the CIA briefing routine, of which he had not been informed.) The uncertainty was short-lived; that evening Ford passed the word that he wanted his usual briefing the next morning at the White House.

NOTES

1. Richard Helms, Memorandum for the Record, "Briefing of Former Vice President Nixon and Governor Agnew," 12 August 1968.
2. Interview of Richard Helms by the author in Washington, DC, 16 March 1993. Subsequent comments of Helms come also from this interview.
3. Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York; Grosset and Dunlap; 1978), p. 316. Nixon's Democratic opponent in 1968, Hubert Humphrey, routinely received intelligence reports by virtue of being the incumbent Vice President. Two other candidates also received intelligence briefings in that unusual year: former Alabama Governor George Wallace on 26 July; and Georgia Governor Lester Maddox on 21 August. Helms and others briefed each of these candidates in Rusk's office, generally on the same array of subjects they had covered with Nixon. Very brief accounts of these sessions can be found in Helms's Memorandums for the Record: "Briefing of Former Governor George C. Wallace," 26 July 1968; and "Briefing of Governor Lester Maddox," 22 August 1968.
4. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 336.
5. The material that follows regarding the Agency's activities in New York City draws very heavily on the classified writings of the late Paul H. Corscadden; he is in effect the author of this section.
6. They had planned to fly, but a heavy snowfall intervened, and the three men traveled by train instead, arriving at Pennsylvania Station in the storm-struck metropolis at the onset of the evening rush hour. They were provided a police escort to take them through the badly snarled traffic to the Central Park area and the Pierre Hotel.
7. A more detailed discussion of Smith's exchange with Kissinger can be found in his memoirs, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency* (Washington; Pergamon-Brassey's; 1980), pp. 201-203.
8. The CIA officers involved in this exercise were delighted later in the month when Kissinger sent Helms a letter of thanks for their extraordinary efforts.
9. Interview of Richard Lehman by the author in McLean, Virginia, 10 March 1993.
10. Telephone interview of Lawrence Eagleburger by the author, 1 November 1993. Other comments by Eagleburger come also from this interview.
11. Telephone interview of Andrew Goodpaster by the author, 17 November 1993.
12. Interview of Kenneth Rosen by the author in McLean, Virginia, 22 March 1993.
13. Interview of Richard Helms by R. Jack Smith, Washington, DC, 21 April 1982.
14. Interview of William Colby by the author in Washington, DC, 7 April 1993. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent comments by Colby also come from this interview.
15. William Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York; Simon and Schuster; 1978), p. 373.
16. The material that follows regarding the Agency's support of President Ford was in large part drafted by David A. Peterson.
17. In the election campaign of 1972, there had been no special intelligence briefings. Nixon, as the incumbent president, continued to receive the PDB. His Democratic opponent, Senator George McGovern, at one point had agreed (against the counsel of his advisers) to receive an intelligence briefing from Kissinger. The CIA was to follow up with regular briefings. Unfortunately, the political crisis involving McGovern's running mate, Senator Thomas Eagleton, forced the cancellation of the Kissinger briefing, and it proved impossible to reschedule either that briefing or the others that were to follow.
18. Interview of Gerald Ford by the author in Beaver Creek, Colorado, 8 September 1993.